

Unity is Strength: How User Feedback Influences Technical Decisions in the Able to Include Project

Poster presentation

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Background

People with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) currently have very limited access to the information society and social media websites. Not being able to access or use information technology is a major form of social exclusion. The Able to Include project aims to overcome this problem by developing a set of technologies that can improve the daily lives of people with ID. One such technology is the Picto translation system, which translates Dutch, English, and Spanish written text into a series of Sclera or Beta pictographs, and vice versa. At the time of developing the Picto system, a number of technical decisions had to be made. In order to create a truly useful tool that is tailored toward the target group, the end users' feedback turned out to be indispensable.

Method

Within the project, three types of pilot studies are carried out. One concerns "Leisure within the Information Society", another one "Mobility", and the third one "Labour Integration". These pilots allow, through the interaction with real users, for a permanent adjustment of the project, especially of the tools and resources involved.

Results

The results of the Flemish pilot studies are used to adapt and improve the Dutch Picto translation technology. Testing is a particularly long process, especially since it requires very small steps to be taken. However, we found that, if that time is spent meaningfully and a solid methodology is adopted, the feedback that is given by the end users can be exceptionally valuable. For instance, they thought the initial pictograph output was too long and complex, so a simplification module was added. There are many examples of how the users' opinions influence our technical decisions.

Conclusions

The users are enthusiastic about being part of the project. They are eager to learn more about the technologies and positive about accessing Facebook through them. After all, they are the experts, and when new technologies are developed for them, they should, ideally, be involved from the very start.